2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

LEPROSY

●164 Leprosy is very prevalent in Yakut Province, particularly in the Viliuisk and Kolymsk districts. Of all Russia, Yakut Province leads in the distribution of this disease, there being one case of leprosy in every 2,800—a very high percentage. In Europe it has been estimated that there are one or two cases in every 10,000.

A few words may be added here on the history of leprosy. Egypt is regarded as its birthplace. Its distribution in Europe varies. England,

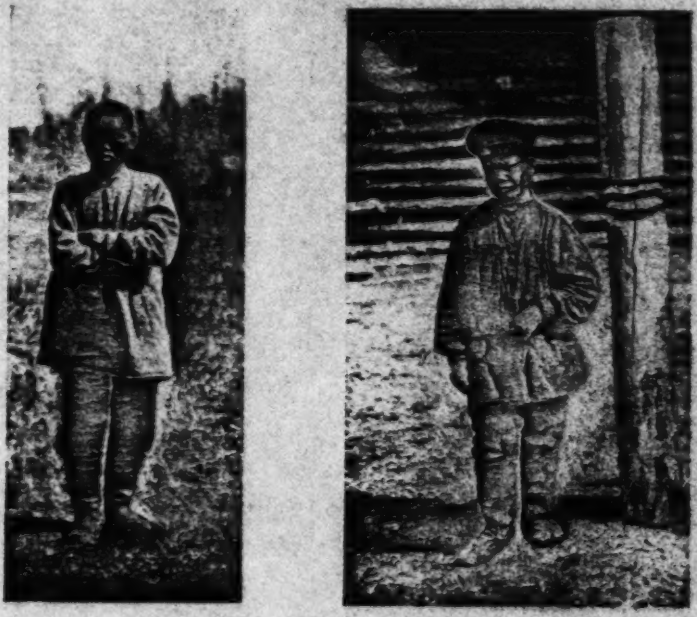

Fig. 103. Patients in the Leper House at Sredne Kolymsk.

Denmark, Holland, and Belgium are exempt. All other European countries are affected to different degrees. It is more widespread in Russia and the southern European countries than in the north. The essential cause of leprosy is still unknown. The lepra-bacillus was discovered in 1871 by the Norwegian scientist, Hansen. That leprosy may be contagious is now admitted by all medical authorities, but we do not know of any cases in which nurses or doctors attending leprous people were affected by the disease. This may be explained by the preventive measures usually taken by the medical personnel. The hereditary trans-

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

mission of leprosy is at present denied, provided the child is separated from the afflicted parent. It is now also accepted that in its early stages, leprosy may be cured. There are two leper-houses in Yakutsk Province, in the districts of Viliuisk and Kolymsk, which are isolated from the local population. 154

Fig. 103 shows two lepers, with the disease in an advanced stage, photographed by me in the leper-house of Sredne Kolymsk. Their finger joints and toes have dropped off, leaving well healed stumps. Their faces (called lions' faces), their eye-lids, the lining of their mouths, noses, throats, and larynx (causing hoarseness) are covered with ulcers, deeply implicating the structure and function of the peripheral nervous system.

6: Sauer--124[2] G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 147, 164, 756

"The Yakuti are a healthy and hardy race, bear the extremes of heat and cold to an astonishing degree, and travel in the severest frosts on horseback, frequently suffering much from hunger; they are, however, subject to rheumatic pains, boils, the itch, and sore eyes; and great numbers were carried off in 1758 and 1774 by the small-pox and measles: the shamans are their doctors."

17: Erman--315-316 N-3 (1828-29) 1850 Yakut
116, 291, 164, 855

"We first went eight versts, on a level tract, to a yurt which stands on the broad valley of a rivulet. It belonged to an aged [316] Yakut who, with a young wife, had a family of five children. His business was fishing in the neighbouring stream; yet here again I found some calves occupying the straw in the narrow dwelling. The children were quite naked, and even the woman, who had slept till near mid-day, had nothing on but her short drawers, and went about with the upper part of her body naked all the time that I was in the yurt. In this there was no breach of Yakutian propriety, for women are not forbidden to expose themselves in this manner, except in the presence of their father-in-law, or of their husband's elder brother. She was a well-grown woman, with regular, handsome features; but, at the same time, disfigured with filth, like every thing else in this miserable hut. One of the elder children, which was running about with the others, was afflicted with a remarkable and formidable-looking eruption. The left side of its body exhibited a wound about an inch wide, which had extended, herpetically, from the head perpendicularly down to the middle of the body. On the parts affected, the upper skin seemed totally destroyed, and instead of it there was only to be seen the blood-red flesh. The parents, when I asked them about this malady, seemed to look upon it as a usual and ordinary matter; and in truth I subsequently saw many cases of it among the Yakuts, but chiefly in children."

17: Erman--319 N-3 (1828-29) 1850 Yakut-1-2
116, 164

"In M. Argunov's yurt was a girl, ten years old, the daughter of a Russian settler and a Yakutian woman. She seemed to be perfectly healthy, when, on a sudden, a few months before, this hereditary poison began to show its effects, and developed itself with fearful rapidity. There was now to be seen on one side of her head a bare stripe, which was not above an inch wide, and had a healthy growth of hair on both sides. It extended in a straight line from the skull forwards, and terminated in a sore-looking stripe of the same width on the forehead. The prolongation of this downwards had involved half of the left eye, and attacked it herpetically. The cornea must have been completely eaten through, for the fluids of the eye were running out, and the whole had a horrible appearance. Yet the patient was without pain, and the rest of her face was quite free from disfigurement. It seemed as if the devouring virus attacked only those places which it reached as it descended by its weight. Yet I cannot suppose that the cause which regulates its propagation immediately, is really so simple; for, in that case, the uniform direction of its course would be interrupted by the position of the patient when sleeping: yet, among the external characters of this eruption, one of the most constant is, that it propagates itself from above downwards in directions parallel with the mean line of the human body. (1)

1. Dr. Küber, while accompanying Wrangel's expedition to the Icy Sea in 1821-3, , observed among the Yakuts of the circle of

Srednekoluimsk, a disease which he pronounces to be elephantiasis. It always proves fatal among the Yakuts, who have no medical assistance, but Dr. Küber is of opinion that it would yield to proper treatment."

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

particular by the poorer people who had no cattle, although it was also a secondary diet for the wealthier groups in the population. In the summer, people used to eat fresh fish boiled in water or slightly fried (carp and other small fish), on spikes or in a frying pan (the scales were removed but the innards were left untouched). A great deal of fish was stocked up for the winter, pickled in bark-lined pits; the acidified and half-rotten fish—syma—was then frozen and used to make butugas as a substitute for milk tar. The more valuable types of fish, particularly steriet, white salmon, and whitefish of various types, were consumed in the raw, frozen form.

With rare exceptions, meat was eaten only in the wealthier households. Most highly valued was horsemeat, but even among the rich it was not served too often. Beef was eaten more frequently. The meat of various other animals, especially in the northern hunting regions, was also eaten. It was usually boiled (though attempts were made not to overcook it), and sometimes roasted in the old manner on wooden spikes. Fat was specially highly valued. The carcasses of slaughtered cattle were kept for the winter in frozen form. The Yakuts did not eat certain types of wild animals and birds—beasts of prey, sea gulls, ravens, cuckoos and owls—and they refused to eat the brains of domestic animals. During the 19th century, under Russian influence, bread began to be eaten and later salt, sugar and tea became part of the diet of the Yakuts. Dealers brought in vodka to the ulusy.

Hygiene

The living conditions of the Yakuts before the Revolution were extremely unhygienic. As a result of the filth, overcrowding and stagnant air in the yurt with its earthen floor and cattle-shed right next door conditions were completely abnormal. Furthermore, the Yakuts, particularly in winter, rarely washed themselves, and the washing of clothes was practically unknown.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that there were frequent epidemics. Skin diseases were particularly rampant, and mange, ringworm, ulcers, and so on were due to the permanent contamination of the skin. Eye diseases (trachoma, etc.) were very common, particularly among the older people, a large number of whom lost their sight. According to the 1915 census, there were 110 blind people per 10,000 Yakuts. True leprosy existed in some of the damp, marshy regions; isolation shelters for lepers were arranged in out of the way spots. Tuberculosis was quite common.

Nervous disorders were widespread in the northern regions of Yakutiya, particularly among women, which was due to the difficult living conditions, exhausting work, and to a number of women's diseases, etc. The nervous disorders took such forms as Arctic hysteria, the so-called menerik, which is something like epilepsy; the sick woman throws a fit during which she shouts and raves until she falls asleep exhausted. Another, similar nervous disorder was *amyptx*; the symptoms are an unconscious, involuntary imitation of anything which frightens or astonishes the sufferer.

The Yakuts had no rational method of treating these ailments. They often used primitive domestic cures such as cauterizing, licking the pus from sores and so on. It was usual during sickness to resort to quack doctors and shamans.

Social Structure

The social structure of the Yakuts, as it had developed by the time of the October Revolution, was a peculiar mishmash of complex forms of

people have been taught to read and write. Work continues with those who are only partially literate in the network of adult schools. 212

In 1917 there were only two clubs, three small libraries and one museum in Yakutiya. In 1951 the Republic had more than 1000 educational-cultural establishments, among which there were about 500 reading rooms, several hundred libraries and 5 museums. At the present time there are Party schools in all rayons. In 1948, 986 amateur music and entertainment groups were functioning in the various clubs. There are regular amateur art exhibitions in the clubs and houses of culture. In the north, e.g., the Anabarskiy, Olenekskiy and other rayons,—Red tents with mobile film units have been set up for the population of the tundra. 217 178 871

Public Health

Planned medical assistance was not provided for the population of Yakutiya until the coming of the Soviet regime. By 1927 there were 37 hospitals, 50 medical-assistant points with 627 beds, and 20 outpatient clinics in the Republic. Over the years of the Five-Year Plans the medical network has been greatly increased. There are now more than 630 medical establishments in the Republic, which employ 500 doctors and more than 2500 personnel with intermediate medical training. 743

An important health center has been created in Yakutsk. The Republic hospital with 500 beds consists of several large standard blocks. It is fitted out with the latest medical equipment. There are also a number of specialized hospitals in Yakutiya. The 33 epidemiological stations and bacteriological laboratories are working hard; more than 500 clinical laboratories have been set up. Vaccination against measles, tularemia, etc. is carried out at a number of laboratories. Since 1940 medical assistance has been given to the population of the most remote parts of the Republic by aircraft. Flying surgeons performed 183 operations in the year 1951 alone. 743 744

The Yakuts have made great progress in safeguarding pregnant mothers and infants. In 1924 the first obstetric consultation office in the Republic was opened. In 1940 there were 9 state-owned maternity homes, 37 collective farm maternity homes and 37 permanent nurseries in service. In 1952 the number of nurseries had been raised to 82, with accommodation for 2644 children. 743 843 844

Particular attention has been given by the Yakut government to the campaign against a legacy of the past, i.e., such social diseases as tuberculosis and trachoma. A wide network of medical and disease-prevention establishments has been set up. Every man, woman and child undergoes tests for tuberculosis, and practically all the regional hospitals are equipped with X-ray apparatus. Antitubercular inoculation is normal practice. 744

In 1924 a special brigade was sent to Yakutiya from the center to make a study of different parts of the Yakut ASSR on the prevalence of trachoma. In 1945 the first trachoma clinic was opened. The incidence of trachoma has sharply declined as a result of tremendous work in preventive medicine and hygiene education; blindness due to trachoma has been reduced to nil. In many places there have been set up interrayon centers where specialized medical aid can be obtained. There are two mudbath resorts in Yakutiya. [164]

The number of medical officials has sharply increased. In 1952, as compared with 1922, the number of doctors had increased by a factor of 30, while there were 26 times more personnel with intermediate medical training. 759